

# COVID-19

Graduation ceremonies give students, their families, teachers, and institutions an opportunity to celebrate an important milestone. High school and collegiate graduation ceremonies are permitted in LA County as long as they are held outdoors and follow the public health modifications described in the [State Guidance for Prevention of COVID-19 Transmission for Commencement/Graduation Ceremonies](#) and County Public Health Protocols for [Outdoor Seated Live Events](#). Keep in mind that it is also possible to hold graduation ceremonies via vehicle-based parade or a drive-in format if that works better for your school community or if capacity limits make an in-person event difficult. To do your graduation in one of those ways, please refer to the [Protocol for Vehicle-Based Parades](#) or the [Protocol for Drive-In Experiences](#).

Many of the modifications below are based on the Tier that the County is in at the time of the graduation ceremony. The Tier assignment helps us describe the level of COVID-19 transmission at any given time. Los Angeles County is currently in Orange Tier, which indicates a moderate level of community transmission. This document describes modifications based on the current Tier assignment.

## 1. Where can we hold the graduation ceremony?

Graduation ceremonies must be held outdoors in venues where each attendee can be assigned to a seat. This can include venues that have fixed seats (for example, outdoor sports stadiums or amphitheaters) as well as venues where temporary seating is brought in (for example, parks or sports fields with rented seats that have been placed at a safe distance).

The facility must be open to the sky with no roof or have at least 50% of the total perimeter open, meaning there are no walls, doors, windows, dividers, or other physical barriers that restrict air flow, whether open or closed. There must be sufficient natural ventilation and air circulation to dilute and disperse concentrations of aerosols effectively without the support of mechanical systems.

## 2. How many people can attend the graduation ceremony?

Los Angeles County is currently in Yellow Tier, so occupancy for graduation ceremonies is limited by the occupancy that's established by the State Guidance for Outdoor Live Seated Events. This state guidance caps attendance at **67% of total venue occupancy** based on the design/operating capacity or fire department occupancy limit.

Attendee groups are limited to a single household unit and may not reserve more than 6 seats for a single group, unless the event has a special section reserved for fully-vaccinated persons and all members of the group are fully vaccinated, in which case an attendee group may reserve a block of more than 6 seats.

## 3. Can graduating college/university students who are living out of state attend their graduation ceremonies?

In general, only **in-state guests** may attend graduation ceremonies, with few exceptions.

A student graduating from a Los Angeles County institute of higher education who has been living outside California due to the pandemic, may travel into Los Angeles County and attend their graduation ceremony.

# COVID-19

They will be considered an in-state guest for the strict and limited purpose of attending their graduation ceremony. Travelers arriving from outside of California should refer to the [Los Angeles County Travel Advisory](#) and note travel requirements currently in effect, including that all persons traveling into Los Angeles County from outside California who are not fully vaccinated must follow quarantine requirements as described.

#### 4. Can family members travel from outside California to attend as guests at a graduation ceremony?

In general, only **in-state guests** may attend graduation ceremonies, with few exceptions.

If a guest can present evidence that they have been fully vaccinated, then they may attend the graduation ceremony, even if they are coming from out of state or from another country.

Persons originating from out-of-state who are not fully vaccinated may not attend as guests at live events including a graduation ceremony.

#### 5. What is required to meet the vaccination requirement?

Attendees that attest to full vaccination must show the venue the required verification, which is a photographic identification and a proof of the person's vaccination, such as the vaccination card (which includes the name of person vaccinated, type of vaccination provided and date last dose administered) or a photo of a vaccination card as a separate document or a photo of the attendee's vaccine card stored on a phone or electronic device or documentation of vaccination from a healthcare provider, before they are permitted entry into the venue or stadium.

For the purposes of complying with the vaccination requirement, guests are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 at 2 weeks or more after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or 2 weeks or more after they have received a single-dose vaccine (e.g., Johnson and Johnson [J&J]/Janssen). International guests are considered fully vaccinated if they have received a [vaccine](#) that has been approved under EUA by the World Health Organization or another national regulating agency.

#### 6. Who counts towards the occupancy limit?

Every person who attends the graduation ceremony counts toward the occupancy limit except for employees that are fully vaccinated. That includes but is not limited to:

- Students
- Family members
- School staff or faculty that have not submitted proof of full vaccination
- Graduation speakers or performers

#### 7. Are there special rules for people who are fully vaccinated?

Graduation organizers may choose to create a separate seating area or areas for people who have been

# COVID-19

verified to be fully vaccinated. These seating areas must be separate, distinct, and clearly marked from any other section of the venue that is set aside for the seating of tested or non-tested attendees. Individuals who are seated in these areas do not have to be physically distanced and may be seated at full capacity within that section only. Suites may operate at 100% suite capacity if all guests show proof of full vaccination. Organizers must ensure that there are at least 3 feet of distance between fully vaccinated-only sections and any other section in the venue. Children 2 years of age and older who are not eligible to be vaccinated may sit with their parent, guardian or sponsor in the fully-vaccinated-only section if they are tested. Children younger than 2 years old do not need to be tested and may also sit with their parent, guardian, or sponsor in the fully-vaccinated-only section.

## 8. Do I have to file an application with the County Department of Public Health to hold a graduation ceremony?

If attendance at your graduation ceremony will exceed **250 attendees** you must submit a [Proposed Event Form](#) to explain how the graduation ceremony will be operated in compliance with all required modifications. This form should be submitted at least 14 days prior to the graduation ceremony. LACDPH will acknowledge receipt of this application within 5 business days.

If you are planning a drive-in graduation, you must submit a written plan to address all safety and health issues to [ehmail@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:ehmail@ph.lacounty.gov) at least 7 days in advance as described on page 7 of the [LACDPH Protocol for Drive-In Movies](#).

## 9. What do graduation organizers need to do to keep graduations safe?

In general, graduation organizers must take the same precautions as we have all been taking throughout the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Ensure that there is an [entry screening process](#) in place to check all attendees for COVID-19 symptoms on the day of the graduation ceremony before they are able to enter the facility. Communicate in writing to all graduates, their household members, school personnel and others who may attend that if they are feeling ill, have symptoms of COVID-19 or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, they should not attend the graduation event.
- All attendees must wear an appropriate **face mask that covers the mouth and nose and fits snugly to the face**. Face masks must be worn at all times, except that graduation speakers may briefly remove their masks during their remarks as long as they are six feet away from other attendees. Speakers should keep the time for comments brief to limit the time they are unmasked.
- Seat assignments should be made in a way that enables attendees to maintain **physical distancing** of at least 6 feet from those who are not members of their household. Attendees may be seated with members of their own households.
- **Hand sanitizer** should be made easily available to participants as they enter and leave the facility.

# COVID-19

## **10. Can multiple ceremonies be held in one day?**

Yes, schools may plan multiple ceremonies in a day. However, organizers must allow for at least a two-hour gap between ceremonies to prevent mixing of different groups of attendees and to enable sufficient time for cleaning the facility between ceremonies.

## **11. May we serve food or beverages at the graduation ceremony?**

Yes, food and beverages may be served at the graduation ceremony. However, State guidance only permits food to be served either directly to attendees while they are seated in their assigned seats or at concessions stands or designated concessions pick-up areas with lines that are physically distanced. Attendees may only consume food or beverages while seated in their designated seats or in designated dining areas that comply with the County Public Health [Protocol for Restaurants](#). Attendees may not circulate throughout the facility while eating and drinking. Graduation organizers must ensure that signage is posted to remind all attendees that they may not eat or drink except while they are seated.

## **12. How should we handle distribution of caps and gowns?**

Graduation organizers should set up a system for distributing graduation regalia that enables students to get their caps and gowns with limited contact with others. This may be accomplished by mailing regalia to students' home addresses or by setting up pick-up times on campus well in advance of the graduation ceremony.

## **13. Can graduates receive their diplomas in a procession?**

Yes, graduates may receive their diplomas as part of a procession, though modifications need to be made to the usual process. If graduates will be walking across a stage, they should be directed to come up to the stage in small, staggered groups, and maintain 6-feet of distance from each other and everyone else as they proceed to and from the stage. Graduation ushers should be available to direct graduates to enter the stage from one side and exit from the other.

Diplomas, certificates and awards should be picked up from a table instead of handed directly from one individual to another. All attendees should be reminded that the usual displays of encouragement such as hugs, high fives, and yelling or chanting are discouraged and should be replaced this year with physically distant clapping.

## **14. Can we hold receptions before or after the graduation?**

Yes, receptions are permitted before or after the graduation, and must comply with all requirements within the County Guidance for Informal Social Gatherings [Appendix CC](#). Gatherings are limited to a maximum of 100 people in outdoor settings or, when indoors, at 50% of occupancy where capacity limits exist, or 50 people, whichever is fewer. Indoor gatherings are strongly discouraged as they continue to pose a high risk of COVID-19 transmission. All attendees at gatherings must wear masks at all times (except while eating or drinking at outdoor events) unless ALL guests are fully vaccinated. If guests are not fully vaccinated, the gathering should be limited to 2 hours or less in duration and if food or drinks are served,

# COVID-19

guests may only eat or drink outdoors and must be seated while eating and drinking.

## 15. Are other parties or celebrations for graduates (e.g., Senior Prom) permissible?

Yes, other celebrations separate from the graduation ceremony are permitted but different rules apply depending on the type of event that is being held. In general, these events break down into two different types – those that are organized by the school, department or organization that has a defined guest list and is held at a venue and those that are informal events held by families and friends. Below are descriptions of the rules that apply for each type of event and links to the guidance that applies in each case. Note that proms will require significant modifications from usual activities in order to comply with protocol requirements.

**Organized, ticketed private events:** Celebratory events that do not occur directly before or after the commencement ceremony, are sponsored by the school, departments, clubs, or on-campus organizations and have a defined guest list and/or a rental or service contract for use of the location, facility or venue are subject to the current limitations on [Private Events \(Meetings, Receptions and Conferences\)](#). Private events that are held outdoors may have a maximum of 200 people or a maximum of 400 people if all guests test negative for COVID-19 (PCR or Antigen test) or show proof of full vaccination. Indoor private events are permitted only if all guests tested negative for COVID-19 or show proof of full vaccination. Indoor events are limited to a maximum of 200 people.

**Informal gatherings:** Any informal graduation-related social events are subject to the current limitations on [informal social gatherings](#). Gatherings are limited to a maximum of 100 people in outdoor settings or 50% of occupancy where capacity limits exist, or 50 people in indoor settings, whichever is fewer. Indoor gatherings are strongly discouraged as they continue to pose a high risk of COVID-19 transmission. All attendees must wear masks at all times unless ALL guests are fully vaccinated. The gathering should be limited to 2 hours or less in duration. If food or drinks are served, guests may only eat or drink outdoors and must be seated while eating and drinking.

## 16. Where can I find reliable, up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation in LA County?

Stay aware of all the most current COVID-19 information as you prepare for the graduation ceremony. Accurate, up-to-date information, including protocols and guidance for various business sectors in LA County, is shared on the LA County DPH webpage.

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
  - <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>
  - Social media: @lapublichealth
- Call 2-1-1